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Improvement of the status of women in the Secretariat

Report of the Secretary-General

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Abbreviations

DD	Department for Disarmament Affairs
DESA	Department of Economic and Social Affairs
DGAACS	Department of General Assembly Affairs and Conference Services
DM	Department of Management
DM/OCSS	Office of Central Support Services
DM/OHRM	Office of Human Resources Management
DM/OPPBA	Office for Programme Planning, Budget and Accounts
DPA	Department of Political Affairs
DPKO	Department of Peacekeeping Operations
DPKO/FALD	Missions
ECA	Economic Commission for Africa
ECE	Economic Commission for Europe
ECLAC	Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean
ESCAP	Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific
ESCWA	Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia
HC/CHR	United Nations High Commissioner/Centre for Human Rights
INTERORG	Inter-organizations
OCHA	Office of the Coordinator for Humanitarian Affairs
OCPI	Office of Communication and Public Information
OIOS	Office of Internal Oversight Services
OLA	Office of Legal Affairs
OSG	Office of the Secretary-General
UNCC	United Nations Compensation Commission
UNCHS	United Nations Centre for Human Settlements
UNCTAD	United Nations Conference on Trade and Development
UNDCP	United Nations International Drug Control Programme
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
UNJSPF	United Nations Joint Staff Pension Fund
UNOG	United Nations Office at Geneva
UNON	United Nations Office at Nairobi
UNOV	United Nations Office at Vienna
UNSCOM	United Nations Special Commission

I. Introduction

1. In its resolution 52/96 of 12 December 1997 on the improvement of the status of women in the Secretariat, the General Assembly requested that an update on the status of women in the Secretariat be submitted to the Commission on the Status of Women at the forty-second session. In the same resolution, the General Assembly reaffirmed the goal contained in the Platform for Action[1] adopted by the Fourth World Conference on Women for the achievement of overall gender equality, particularly at the Professional level and above, by the year 2000, with full respect for the principle of equitable geographical distribution. This initiative is in conformity with Article 101 of the Charter of the United Nations, and also takes into account the lack of representation or underrepresentation of women from certain countries, in particular from developing countries and countries with economies in transition.

2. In the same resolution, the General Assembly welcomed the personal commitment of the Secretary-General to meeting that goal and his assurance that gender balance will be given highest priority in his continuing effort to bring about a new management culture in the Organization.

3. Due to the short time period between the fifty-second session of the General Assembly and the opening of the forty-second session of the Commission on the Status of Women, the present report updates information contained in the reports of the Secretary-General on the improvement of the status of women in the Secretariat (A/52/408) and the composition of the Secretariat (A/52/580); the report includes statistical data and follow-up on measures taken for the achievement of gender balance, and sets forth forecast and alternative actions.

II. Statistical update

4. The statistics on the status of women in the Secretariat show slow but steady improvement. It should be noted that under the reform programme, the nomenclature for departments and offices reported has been changed; therefore, the information reported below reflects the partial consolidation of departments and offices, while the statistical data has not yet been aggregated accordingly.[2] In the overall workforce over the last year, the percentage of women at the Professional level on posts subject to geography has increased from 35.5 per cent to 36.8 per cent, as of 1 January 1998. Although progress in achieving the 50/50 goal has been modest, gains have been made at a time when the Organization is undergoing significant restructuring and downsizing. This is a small but positive trend towards reaching the mandated targets set by the General Assembly. Other developments also reflect women's progress towards the 50/50 goal. Over the same time period, for instance, the percentage of women staff in higher-level positions (D-1 and above), where their representation has traditionally been low, has increased from 18.5 per cent in December 1996 to 22.6 per cent as of 1 January 1998.

5. The Secretary-General's commitment to bringing gender balance to the United Nations has been unequivocal, as recently demonstrated by his appointment of a woman as the first Deputy Secretary-General of the Organization. Nevertheless, statistics projecting developments within Professional levels also reveal that a "glass ceiling" exists for women, in particular at the highest levels of the Organization. However, the Secretary-General has stated his intentions to abolish these barriers in the near future. While the median (fiftieth percentile) grade of men was that of P-4 between December 1987 and April 1997, over the same time period the median grade of women was P-3. As of 1 January 1998, there was one woman Under-Secretary-General as compared to 17 men, and three women Assistant Secretaries-General as compared to nine men.

6. The gender composition of offices and departments is also important since it reflects the extreme variation in women's status on a departmental level. By 1 January 1998, only four offices with 20 personnel or more (DM/OHRM, DM/OUSG, OCPI and DGAACS) had achieved the 50 per cent goal at the Professional level and above, while 10 such offices, in descending order (UNJSPF, UNDCP, DM/OPPBA, DESA, HC/CHR, OLA, DPKO, UNOG, DPA and OIOS) had attained and surpassed the previously set goal of 35 per cent Professional women, as mandated in General Assembly resolution 45/239 of December 1990, and 12 offices (DPKO/FALD, ESCAP, ECLAC, OCHA, UNCHS, ESCWA, OSG, UNOV, DM/OCSS, ECE, UNCTAD and ECA) had yet to attain the previously set goal of 35 per cent Professional women. The only office to reach the 50 per cent goal at the D-1 level and above was DM/OHRM, with 57.1 per cent, while in two departments (UNDCP and OCHA) women were completely absent at those levels. Such variations in the representation of women between departments and offices pose yet another challenge towards meeting the 50/50 goal.

Gender distribution of staff in the United Nations Secretariat, by department or office and by grade: Professional and higher level staff in posts subject to geographical distribution, as of 1 January 1998

Department/ Office	USG		ASG		D-2		D-1		P-5		P-4		P-3		P-2		P-1		Total		Grand Total	% of Women
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F		
unscom								1											0	1	1	100.0 %
dm/ohrm				1	1	2	2	1	5	10	12	10	11	10	2	6			33	40	73	54.8 %
dm	1						3	1	5	4	1	5	1	2	1	2			12	14	26	53.8 %
ocpi			1		4	2	9	5	18	15	37	33	29	37	24	34			122	126	248	50.8 %
dgaacs	1		1		2	1	6	4	8	3	6	10	4	9	1	2			29	29	58	50.0 %
unjspf							2	1	4	3	6	5	5	5		1			17	15	32	46.9 %
undcp	1				2		3		5	2	5	8	7	7	4	5			27	22	49	44.9 %
dm/oppba			1		4		3	1	7	8	14	11	12	12	8	7			49	39	88	44.3 %
unep					1	1	2		1	1	1	1	1	1	2	2			8	6	14	42.9 %
desa	1			1	8	2	23	6	35	27	48	40	31	21	15	20			161	117	278	42.1 %
hc/chr		1					2		7	4	9	2	9	8	3	6			30	21	51	41.2 %
ola	1				3		4	2	10	7	8	4	11	6	5	9			42	28	70	40.0 %
dpko	1		2		2		8	1	3	5	12	6	10	13	6	3			44	28	72	38.9 %
unog	1				2		8	2	7	6	10	4	18	14	12	9			58	35	93	37.6 %
dpa	1		2		5	1	6	6	14	6	18	9	11	10	6	4			63	36	99	36.4 %
oios	1						2	1	6	2	12	7	8	2	3	6			32	18	50	36.0 %
dd					1		2		2	3	4	2		1	2				11	6	17	35.3 %
dpkofald							5	1	9	4	5	2	2	2		2			21	11	32	34.4 %
escap	1					1	8	2	16	3	29	11	21	12	11	14			86	43	129	33.3 %
unon							1		1	1	4	1	3	2	3	2			12	6	18	33.3 %
eclac	1				1		6	4	12	6	34	12	21	9	16	11			91	42	133	31.6 %
ocha	1				5		2		8	3	5	4	4	2	1	3			26	12	38	31.6 %
unchs			1		1		2	1	4	2	10	3	6	4	1	1			25	11	36	30.6 %
escwa	1					1	5		12	3	21	4	4	8	7	6			50	22	72	30.6 %
osg	1			1	2	1	4		2	3	3	1	4	1					16	7	23	30.4 %
unov					3		2	2	9	2	12	4	9	7	2	1			37	16	53	30.2 %
dm/ocss			1		1	1	7	1	12	4	23	8	20	12	10	3			74	29	103	28.2 %
ece	1						6	2	14	1	16	7	21	8	8	4			66	22	88	25.0 %
interorg					1				3		1		1	1		1			6	2	8	25.0 %
unctad	1				1	1	17	2	35	5	41	7	37	21	17	9			149	45	194	23.2 %
eca	1						9	4	27	4	35	8	37	12	14	8			123	36	159	22.6 %
uncc					1				1										2	0	2	0.0 %
Totals	**17**	**1**	**9**	**3**	**51**	**14**	**159**	**51**	**302**	**147**	**442**	**229**	**358**	**259**	**184**	**181**			**1522**	**885**	**2407**	**36.8 %**

III. Update on the measures taken for the achievement of gender equality

Special measures for the improvement of the status of women in the Secretariat

7. The special measures for the achievement of gender equality, issued in January 1996 in an administrative instruction (ST/AI/412), have been instrumental in guiding the Organization towards reaching its numerical and qualitative gender balance goals. To further strengthen the applicability of the measures and to clarify their practical implications, the Assistant Secretary-General for Human Resources Management, together with the Special Adviser for Gender Issues and Advancement of Women, co-chaired a working group consisting of representatives of the Office of Human Resources Management, the Focal Point in the Secretariat, the Staff Committee and the Group on Equal Rights for Women in the United Nations.

8. In this process, the revised special measures would include more effective measures for monitoring and evaluating departmental efforts to achieve the goal of gender balance. The revised special measures are expected to be issued in Spring 1998.

Gender training

9. Training incorporating gender mainstreaming has now been completed in the Division on the Advancement of Women, and it is forecasted to commence in the Department of Political Affairs in February 1998. It is intended that gender training be expanded in this biennium to other departments and overseas offices of the Secretariat. Each departmental training activity will be tailored to meet the unique needs of specific departments and offices. The approach adopted involves motivating gender awareness and organizational change by linking the concept of quality of work/effectiveness with that of gender equality.

Work/family

10. In order to reconcile the issues of work and family responsibilities and bring to the forefront of the human resources management agenda the quality of work/family life, the Secretary-General has endorsed a family leave programme, as approved by the Fifth Committee and the General Assembly in its resolution 52/219 of 22 December 1997, with the following provisions: sick leave to be used to attend to family-related emergencies; partial conversion of maternity leave to paternity leave in dual-career families where both spouses are Secretariat staff members; special leave as a parental leave for up to two years; and provisions for special unpaid leave for staff members to respond to serious family matters. These provisions fall strictly within the parameters of current entitlements, as requested by the General Assembly in its resolution 51/226 of 3 April 1997, in which the Assembly specifies that a family leave programme for United Nations staff should be developed without creating supplementary leave entitlements. Notably, this initiative follows developments in both the public and private sectors, where employers have recognized the importance of assisting staff in meeting their personal needs in order to maintain productivity, minimize absenteeism and staff turnover, reduce conflict and stress, and improve overall performance.

Data bank

11. The Consultative Committee on Administrative Questions, together with the Information Systems Coordinating Committee of the Administrative Committee on Coordination, are in the process of developing a system for inter-agency mobility of women staff to increase their experience, as well as to provide effective means of making the résumés of spouses/significant others available to the organizations, and to further develop approaches for facilitating system-wide mobility. The pilot project will be an Internet-based databank information system. It is envisaged that the United Nations system worldwide, as well as other international organizations, will eventually join this initiative, which would result in the establishment of an international inter-agency roster of women and men candidates.

IV. Forecast and alternative actions

12. A number of initiatives, as described in paragraphs 7 to 11 above, have been taken in order to foster the achievement of the 50/50 goal, including continued efforts at the implementation of a strategic plan, and the further development of special measures. Still, the achievement of the 50 per cent overall goal for women by the year 2000 at all levels, including senior-level posts and those subject to geographical distribution, will provide a great challenge to both the Organization and Member States.

13. The composition of the Secretariat is a dynamic process whose parameters are determined by new legislative mandates, including the abolishment of outdated programmes and projects, which result in the hiring of new staff, the transfer of staff, promotions and retirements. Each of these actions has a particular type of impact on gender balance.

14. Recent projections for separations due to retirement show that this element will play a major role in determining the pace at which change can occur in the United Nations since more men than women will reach retirement in the next 10 years. The above-mentioned report on the composition of the Secretariat forecasts that between 1997-2001, an average of 13.8 per cent or 312 people will retire yearly, and between the years 2002 and 2010 that number will increase to approximately 600 annual retirements. The next decade will thus provide a window of opportunity to improve the status of women, including those from developing countries, in particular at the senior decision-making levels.

15. It is earnestly hoped that with the full cooperation of departments and offices, the revised special measures will ensure that the above-mentioned opportunities are fully utilized to achieve gender balance within the Organization. Two initiatives which, in conjunction with the special measures as well as gender training, work life and other measures, will accelerate progress towards the improvement of the status of women in the Secretariat, are described below.

16. It is envisaged that a proactive approach based on the need to assess the status of gender balance in each individual department or office will be taken to establish an action plan that would set specific targets for recruitment and placement, depending on their degree of compliance with mandated goals. More progressive employment equality measures should be implemented in departments that remain furthest from the 50/50 goal.

17. It is further intended that the Secretariat will develop a reference manual of proven good practices on the basis of the progress record of various national and international organizations, including United Nations departments and offices. The manual would include chapters on effective accountability mechanisms, approaches to recruitment and retention of highly qualified women staff, training of women for non-traditional occupations, approaches to enhance the quality of work environments, and mechanisms for information-gathering and information-sharing at both qualitative and quantitative levels.

Notes

[1] *Report of the Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing, 4-15 September 1995* (United Nations publications, Sales No. 96.IV.13), chap. I, resolution 1, annex II.

[2] Due to the restructuring process, there may be some additional organizational changes, as well as a redistribution of posts, which will change the statistical data; updated data will be made available.